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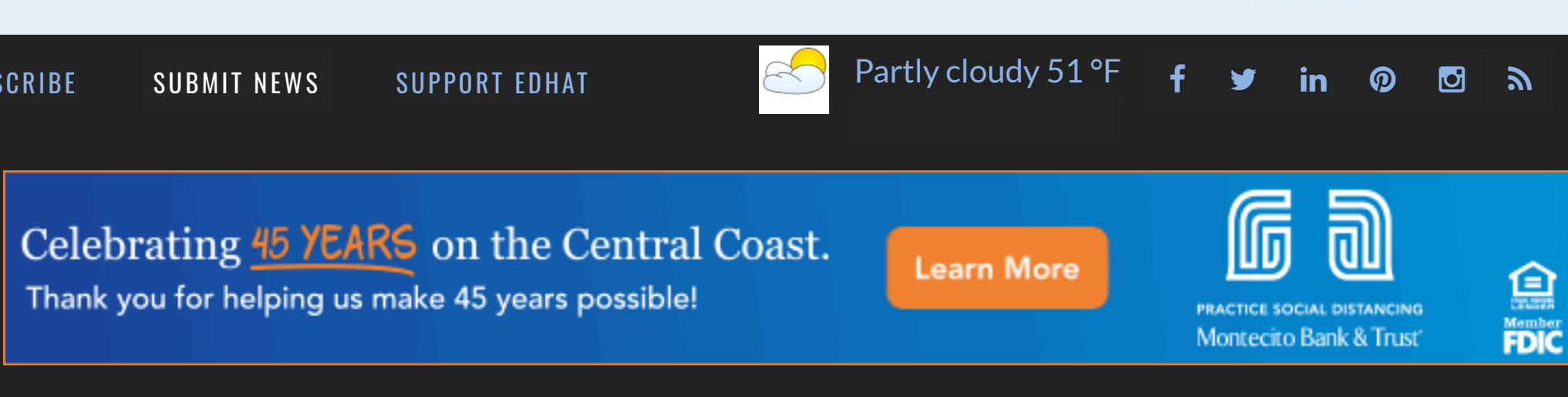
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UCSB UPDATES ON FALL INSTRUCTION AND CAMPUS HOUSING

UCSB / AUG 29 2020 11:05 AM / BY / 10 COMMENTS / READS 1786

By Henry T. Yang, UC Santa Barbara Chancellor

Dear Members of Our Campus Community:

I write to you today regarding our plan for fall quarter in light of the current public health situation. Our plan is the culmination of much work and daily deliberation among our Academic Senate, members of our faculty and staff, our deans, our vice chancellors, and our campus medical experts. We have also received valuable input from our students and parents. In order to comply with Santa Barbara County, California Department of Public Health, and University of California guidelines, we have decided to offer nearly all undergraduate fall courses via remote instruction, and to limit our undergraduate student housing for fall quarter to only those students with special circumstances. We recommend that all other undergraduate students stay home to receive remote instruction. Full refunds will be offered to undergraduates for fall housing contracts. These contracts will be honored in winter quarter or whenever we are able to have our undergraduate students move in.

We know our decision for fall may be a great disappointment for our students who had hoped to return to our beautiful campus next month, and especially for our incoming first-year and transfer students looking forward to an exciting beginning at UC Santa Barbara. We share your disappointment, but we look forward to welcoming you at our virtual New Student Convocation on September 29. We also acknowledge the weight of our decision for our most vulnerable students and their families. And we deeply regret the burden this situation presents for our international students, who will be receiving more information soon from our Office of International Students and Scholars. We remain committed to engaging with all of our students virtually to support their academic progress and personal growth.

Although we do not know how long this pandemic will last, we sincerely hope that by taking these difficult steps now, we will mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and increase the possibility that we will be able to offer in-person instruction and activities, as well as campus housing, in the winter or spring quarters.

Our dedicated UC Santa Barbara faculty, instructors, and staff have worked tirelessly throughout the spring and summer with the hope of bringing our undergraduate students back to campus for fall. We have developed a comprehensive COVID-19 mitigation plan that includes mandatory and frequent testing, physical distancing protocols, reduced classroom occupancy, and enhanced cleaning. Nevertheless, a number of factors outside of our control have led us to this difficult decision.

After complying with the California Department of Public Health's COVID-19 requirements for higher education operations, the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department guidelines, and the County's status on the State COVID-19 watchlist, very little is left of the traditional campus experience for our undergraduate students this fall.

- We are currently prevented from offering in-person classroom instruction, except for the possibility of a few laboratories and performance courses.
- We are currently not allowed to hold any in-person events on campus, including fall sports.
- We are currently not authorized to open our indoor campus study spaces, including the Library, University Center, and Student Resource Building. If we are later allowed to reopen these facilities, access is likely to be intermittent and significantly limited.
- UC and State guidelines also prohibit visitors and community members who are not performing mission-critical work from coming to campus (with the exception of Coastal Access areas).

Our plan for fall quarter has also been influenced by the spike in COVID-19 cases in the neighboring community of Isla Vista, where thousands of our students live. This trend is likely to be exacerbated by bringing additional students to the area. Earlier this month, we wrote to undergraduate students and their parents and guardians outlining our concerns about the dramatic increase in cases among our students living in Isla Vista over the summer. Since the beginning of August, our campus has been informed of more than 65 cases of COVID-19 among our students. This number represents more than 60 percent of the COVID-19 cases in Isla Vista since March. The relatively high population density of Isla Vista and the crowded conditions in which many students live are contributing factors to this recent surge. We urge all of our students who can to avoid being in Isla Vista for fall quarter.

We have been carefully monitoring the situation at universities across the country where students have returned to campus. As you no doubt have seen in the national news, many have faced serious COVID-19 outbreaks among their students within days of reopening. As a result, many have been compelled to suspend in-person courses, and in many cases, have abruptly sent students home or asked them to stay home for the remainder of the calendar year. UC Santa Barbara faces the same public health challenges involved in bringing large numbers of undergraduate students back to campus.

We will hold a Student Affairs Summer Webinar on Wednesday, September 2, at 5-6:15 p.m. to share the latest details about our fall planning and information on available campus resources. The webinar will be recorded and posted for viewing afterward. We have also set up a COVID-19 Call Center for medical, testing, housing, registration, and other questions related to our COVID-19 response. It is operational weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at (805) 893-3113. You may also reach them at ucsb-covid19@ucsb.edu.

We are providing the following contact information to help answer additional questions our undergraduates and their families may have:

- Campus Housing – Mario Muñoz at mmunoz@housing.ucsb.edu
- Undergraduate Academic Advising – academic_advising@ltsc.ucsb.edu
- Campus COVID-19 Call Center – ucsb-covid19@ucsb.edu or (805) 893-3113 (weekdays, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.)
- Student Life – VCSAOffice@sa.ucsb.edu

Graduate Students

For our graduate students, who make up 11 percent of our student body and whose coursework is more independent and research-focused, the situation is much different. Therefore, University graduate student housing will remain open. We are confident that our plans to allow on campus those who are beginning or continuing to pursue their advanced degrees are consistent with federal, California State, and local public health guidelines. These plans include continuing the careful ramping up of our research mission, which is discussed later in this memo.

Remote Work

We are asking our staff colleagues who have been working remotely since mid-March to continue doing so through the end of the 2020 calendar year. We are immensely grateful to our staff for their daily contributions and commitment to our campus throughout this crisis, especially amid the uncertainties and added pressures of balancing work and home life. More information for staff will be provided in the coming weeks regarding work arrangements, required symptom screening in advance of any campus visits, and mandatory flu vaccinations required for all UC employee.

Testing and Exposure Investigation

We have been using outside laboratories to analyze test results for our students who have come to our Student Health Center this summer. We are awaiting CLIA certification for our newly created campus clinical lab, and have established the necessary FDA-approved methods that will significantly increase our on-campus testing capacity. In addition, we have partnered with UC San Francisco and are working to develop a partnership with UCLA's medical system to provide additional standby resources. We are also seeking FDA approval of our UCSB faculty-developed CRISPR-based COVID-19 test for diagnostic use, which will allow us to further increase our testing capacity. Currently, we plan to use this detection system to conduct surveillance testing to complement our other testing protocols.

UC Santa Barbara Student Health currently offers diagnostic COVID-19 testing for symptomatic students and exposed close contacts. All students living in campus housing will be screened with COVID-19 tests upon arrival, with a follow-up test 7-10 days later. We also will require that students in campus housing be tested at regular subsequent intervals.

Our campus has also developed a robust exposure investigation protocol to support Santa Barbara County's contact tracing and care management programs. This will help reduce the spread of COVID-19 by members of our campus community who test positive.

Our intensive and comprehensive efforts to prepare our campus for testing, instruction, residence, and other activities will now shift to the winter and spring quarters, so we can be prepared if State and County public health requirements and local conditions allow us to resume more on-campus operations.

Engaging Remote Instruction

As I wrote to our undergraduate students on August 14, we are profoundly aware that the prospect of an unconventional start to the academic year is extremely disappointing. We will miss welcoming our first-year and transfer students to our campus family in person, and we regret that our returning students will have to spend at least one more quarter away from campus.

Our dedicated faculty and staff members have been working for months to enhance instructional technology, create innovative course design, and develop new teaching strategies to ensure our students have a first-rate educational experience and that they can make progress toward their academic goals. This process has energized and inspired our faculty as they find new ways to interact with their students.

We are fully committed to our students' academic success during these unprecedented times. We are striving to enhance remote instruction, and to offer virtual activities that speak to their desire for connection and community.

On-Campus Research Ramp-up

Our campus efforts to gradually ramp up our on-campus mission-critical research endeavors in accordance with public health guidance have been highly successful. The plan was developed by our Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research in consultation with faculty members, deans, and staff. With the number slowly increasing since mid-June, more than 2,100 UC Santa Barbara researchers have been permitted to work in specialized laboratories and research facilities on campus, in staggered shifts to minimize density and under rigorous protocols. All are adhering to the daily symptom screening requirements and complying with strict mitigation protocols (face coverings, social distancing, and cleaning regimens). Despite some facilities operating seven days a week, no cases of COVID-19 transmission or infections associated with research activities have been reported.

Given this success, the Ramp-up Oversight Committee is reviewing proposals for 250 additional mission-critical researchers to return to campus, and will be working with the deans and the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor to develop protocols for other campus buildings and office space to be utilized in the coming months, as conditions and County regulations allow.

We are extremely grateful to all our faculty, researchers, staff, and students for the extra time and contributions they have made to our on-campus research enterprise under these difficult circumstances. Learning how to discover new knowledge through research, often in a laboratory, is at the very core of our graduate education, which in turn supports our undergraduate student experience.

Looking Ahead

As the fall quarter approaches, we are heartbroken that it will not be filled with the excitement and anticipation of a new academic year. But we hope the sacrifices we make now will have long-term benefits for our campus community and for our families. We know that in the moment a remote quarter or even a remote year feels like a tremendous loss, but the journey we are on together is not bound by time or by the borders of our beautiful campus. It extends far beyond four years for our undergraduates, and hopefully throughout the careers of our graduate students, faculty, and staff.

As always, you are in our hearts and thoughts. We anxiously await the day when we all can be together again in the classroom and on our campus. We remain wholly committed to our academic journey together, and to the educational, research, and service mission of our University.

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A-1598748702 AUG 29, 2020 05:51 PM REPLY

When I was a student one had to sign leases for the school year during the previous spring. If it's still the same system, students are already committed to their apartments for the whole school year, so they'll come and live there. I mean, would you live with your parents if you were going to have to pay for an IV apartment anyway?

OLDE MANN AUG 29, 2020 05:12 PM REPLY

SBCC "students" living in IV has always been a farce. Now that there are no classes we can call it what it is: Tourism. They come here to party and sign one year leases for party pads, what can you expect?

195930 AUG 29, 2020 05:52 PM REPLY

You're right!! 100% acceptance rate, destination school, and unsolicited outreach to out of area students not only compromises our rental market, but now can very well compromise the health of the community. Save money, stay home, stay alive....

195930 AUG 29, 2020 03:16 PM REPLY

Very appreciated! However, all is for naught if SBCC is not on the same page since they infiltrate IV as well. SBCC has already started and there have been plenty of gatherings just in our Mesa neighborhood. Did SBCC try to protect the community by taking this kind of stance too??

A-1598737538 AUG 29, 2020 02:45 PM REPLY

Closing everything down is the easy solution; keeping things open and managing infection transmissions would be a lot harder, but far more educaitonal. Growing new life skills is what higher education is about; not retreating into artificially contrived safety.

EASTBEACH AUG 29, 2020 02:22 PM REPLY

Tough decision but the right thing to do given the circumstances. Agree it was a well-written announcement. It will be interesting to see what happens to the IV rental market. Will well-off families send their kids to IV anyways and have them remote from there? If not, will landlords offer short-term leases that end at the quarter breaks in case things change? Who will be interim tenants? Will prices fall to keep the cash flow moving?

LOCALINSB AUG 29, 2020 12:57 PM REPLY

Will they expel those who are caught hosting and at parties?

A-1598764012 AUG 29, 2020 10:06 PM REPLY

Can they, legally?

SBSAND AUG 29, 2020 12:48 PM REPLY

The level of detail and openness in your article is appreciated! These decisions were hard, I'm sure, but make sense considering how fast covid spreads in densely populated communities. The sooner we can get on top of it, the sooner we will all be able to resume normal life activities. It's mind boggling how much we take for granted, like the ability to go to work, or school, out to eat, go to concerts and movies, etc.

Thanks UCSB! Reducing the surge in IV will help our whole city, and county.

✓ Your comment has been posted.

VVORKER AUG 30, 2020 08:35 AM REPLY

"much work and daily deliberation".....Come on Henry, you fleece $1500 a day from the sanctuary state. Half a million a year, to keep the peace, this golden goose has hit an ice berg, time to rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic...after 20 years working on campus at non state jobs, flowers and tacos, they deserve whats coming to them...I will miss the incredible contrast to the real world, but don't fall for the Ivory tower illusion.
I use to tell Henry and his wife, the campus will make a great golf course some day...but a wise person told me one day, "once a military base, always a military base"
By the way how much did the state pay the Feds for the 264 acres of the DEN ranch, got to be a good story there!!!

CHEMICALSUPERFREAK AUG 29, 2020 01:45 PM REPLY

SBSAND: UCSB isn't reducing the surge in IV. UCSB will limit undergraduates occupancy only in the housing they control, based on "special circumstances". Private housing off-campus in IV is still available and will probably be packed despite COVID. With the library and lecture halls closed, the campus itself will seem quite empty, but there will still be a sizeable number of undergraduates attending laboratory and performance courses in person. Of the 23,000 or so undergraduates enrolled, I expect more than half of them will be living here this fall.

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